

## Pete Clemons on the day The Clash rocked Coventry :: Reader View

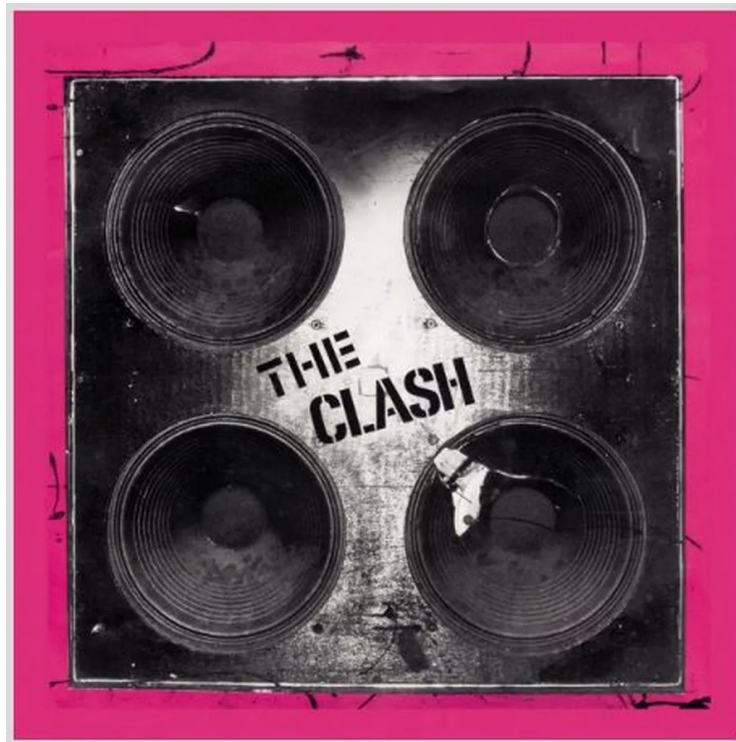
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I really do not have the capacity to fully describe how euphoric the period was, for me personally, from the middle of 1976 and through to late 1978.

For a music listener and gig goer it was an incredibly exhilarating period. New bands seemed to be popping up everywhere. And they were coming from all areas of the country. At the same time there appeared to be a never ending production line of quality seven inch singles.

These singles were by now housed in picture sleeves rather than the standard record industry bags. And, quite often, they were released and distributed by record labels that were completely new to you.



Looking back now, it all seemed to happen with incredible speed. And as quickly as it came it then sort of disappeared as the music scene kind of transitioned into the new romantic period.

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As with many, I was not a punk rocker by way of appearance, my hair was quite long and I lived in denims. But I really did lap up everything that the punk rock period had to offer in terms of music. And yes, for a while, I was guilty of putting to one side, all the previous music genres that had, until then, given me so much pleasure.

One of several bands that totally grabbed my attention back then was The Clash. Hard to believe but it is now 40 years since they burst onto the scene. And yet they are still at the forefront of my mind as one of the most exciting bands I ever had the pleasure of seeing perform live.

For some music lovers The Clash were the greatest rock and roll band of all time. And I for one would find it difficult to disagree with that train of thought.

I am not saying they were the most technically gifted band or that they released the best records ever. I am not even saying that they are my personal favourite band of all time – (although they may have been all three).

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But The Clash were just so exciting aurally and visually. They were explosive on record and absolutely incendiary on stage. And once you had seen them play live you certainly never forgot the experience, at least, that has been the case for me. Nothing quite prepared you for them.

The band was born in a period where a set of incredibly visionary musicians brought with them, an energy, that completely took a nation by storm.

I had never really experienced anything like it before or since and if truth be known, the fact that I am putting this article together, I guess goes to prove some way, the impact they left on me.

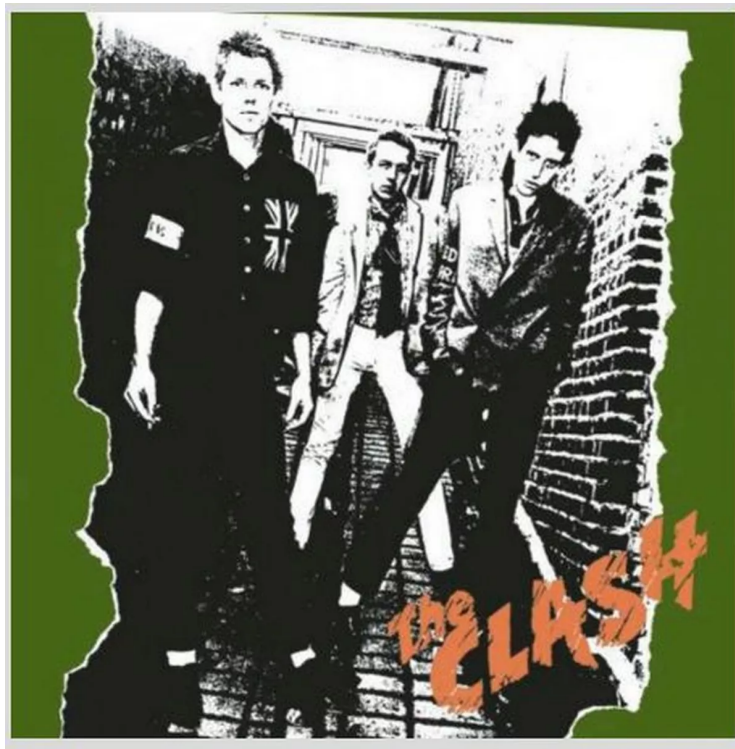
The Clash formed in 1976 and very quickly found themselves in the public eye by way of their association with the then controversial

punk rock movement.

The band initially were Joe Strummer – Guitar and vocals, Mick Jones – lead guitar, Paul Simonon – bass, Keith Levene – Guitar and Terry Chimes - drums

They did their reputation no harm at all when they supported the Sex Pistols on the Anarchy in the UK tour during December 1976. Apart from the cancellations the tour was beset with problems. All but three of the gigs on that tour were cancelled. But most of all, the tour - or lack of it, generated much publicity.

Just prior to this tour The Clash had famously, to the people of Coventry, played at the 'Lanch' along with The Sex Pistols. The gig had been organised as part of the polytechnic's 1976 arts festival.



The first few months of their existence had been fairly fluid in terms of stability of the band yet January 1977 still saw The Clash sign up with CBS records as the three-piece of Strummer, Jones and Simonon.

By then both Levene and Chimes had both departed the band. However with an album to record Terry Chimes, returned to The Clash and the bands self-titled debut album was released during April 1977. Its impact was immediate and immense. The intensity of the songs didn't take me, and a lot of others music listeners, long to realise that The Clash were a band to be taken seriously.

After the album launch Chimes left once more. He was replaced by Nicky 'Topper' Headon who became the band's full-time drummer. Headon's inclusion in the band now meant that The Clash had a solid line up. One that would continue through to 1982.

There then came the release of the single 'Complete Control'. Amongst other things it was actually a pop at their record company CBS for not giving the band complete artistic freedom as allegedly promised.

To support the album and singles The Clash undertook a UK tour. And during November 1977 that tour that took in Coventry Tiffany's (nowadays used as the library).

Soon after, during January 1978, the band returned to Coventry again. This time it was the turn of the Lanchester Polytechnic for the setting.

The band were, initially, due to reappear at Tiffany's but were forced to switch venues at short notice. The Clash had wanted to use Tiffany's to record some tracks for a live album saying that it would have 'provided the right atmosphere'. But the venues management were already in the process of giving the Tiffany's a facelift.

Both gigs were similar in that they opened with 'London's Burning' followed by 'Complete Control' and concluded the set with 'White Riot'. In between the band showcased album tracks like 'Janie Jones', 'Garageland' and 'What's My Name'.

November 1978 saw The Clash again play Coventry. This time it was in support of their second album release 'Give 'em Enough Rope'. From the opening bars of 'Safe European Home' the whole thing left you feeling totally exhausted as the gig, like the others, was played at breakneck speed.

A year later saw the release of the bands third album 'London Calling' with its iconic sleeve. As well as it being a double LP release The Clash were now introducing a new dynamic to their music as they incorporated elements rockabilly and ska. It was all just as frenetic though.

February 1980 saw a fifth and final visit to Coventry by The Clash. Once again Tiffany's provided the venue. The new album featured heavily as tunes such as 'Brand New Cadillac', 'Jimmy Jazz', 'Clampdown' and of course the title track and current single were all included in the set.

Despite this being the bands last action in Coventry it was, of course, not the end of The Clash. Far from it, in fact. Further albums followed that spawned well known songs like 'Rock the Casbah' and 'Should I Stay or Should I Go? '.

The Americans totally took the band to heart. The U.S loved The Clash and The Clash loved the U.S. But all good things come to an end and the band eventually dissolved in 1986.